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**Haunted By You:  
A Study of the Real and Psycho-Literary Space  
of Jack Kerouac's Lowell**

**APPROVED BY  
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

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**Haunted By You:  
A Study of the Real and Psycho-Literary Space  
of Jack Kerouac's Lowell**

**by**

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**Report**

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## **Abstract**

### **Haunted By You: A Study of the Real and Psycho-Literary Space of Jack Kerouac's Lowell**

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

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This report argues that through his lived experiences of growing up in his hometown of Lowell, MA, and the joys and traumas he accrued from early childhood and into early adulthood, Jack Kerouac began to rewrite, reimagine, and reconstruct Lowell in several different works and iterations to attempt to address and exorcise the ghosts of his past. For my argument, I study several of Kerouac's works: *Visions of Gerard* (1963), *Doctor Sax: Faust Part Three* (1959), *Visions of Cody* (1972), and *Book of Dreams* (1960). Pulling from the fields of Beat studies, literary criticism, childhood studies, psychology, geocriticism, and American cultural history, I attempt to highlight the translation and transformation of Lowell in Kerouac's texts into a psycho-literary space.

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## Introduction

Between 1951 and 1960, author Jack Kerouac composed over a dozen novels and novellas, almost half of which were set in Lowell, Massachusetts, during his childhood and adolescence in the 1920s and 1930s. As friend and musician David Amram stated, “To understand where Jack Kerouac was coming from, you had to go to where he came from. You had to come to Lowell.”<sup>1</sup> For Kerouac, Lowell represented and embodied his youth, his innocence and naiveté, and the “tragic and beautiful” aspects of small town life in America.<sup>2</sup> This feeling of idealism in place resonated and permeated within the community and construct of Lowell itself. In a 1962 WCAP radio interview with Charles E. Jarvis and James Curtis, Kerouac told his hosts, “In my opinion, Lowell, Massachusetts, is now the most interesting city in the United States of America.”<sup>3</sup> With utter earnestness, Kerouac believed his hometown was among the best towns and cities in the country and across the globe, and within his literary output, he strived to present and prove this fact to the rest of the world, whether they agreed with his assessment or not.

Lowell in the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a site of relative economic stability as the town found its rhythms with mill productions and national demand. Since the early 1800s, with the founding of the Boott Mill by the Merrimack Manufacturing Company in 1823, Lowell attracted a large number of immigrant populations, predominantly from Eastern and Southern Europe, including Irish, Polish, Greek, and Jewish citizens, and Eastern Canadian providences such as Quebec, where many French-

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<sup>1</sup> David Amram, “Preface” to Paul Maher Jr.’s *Kerouac: The Definitive Biography* (Lanham, MD: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2004), xvii.

<sup>2</sup> Jack Kerouac, *Maggie Cassidy* (New York: Penguin, 1959), 8.

<sup>3</sup> “Dialogues in Great Books” in Paul Maher Jr., *Empty Phantoms: Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2005), 189.

Canadian citizens, including Jack Kerouac's parents, emigrated from by the mid-to-late 1800s. Each of these groups settled across the town and formed their own distinct neighborhoods and sections along the winding Merrimack River, finding work at the textile mills, as well as developing their own small businesses. By the turn of the century, Lowell was a "hodgepodge of textile mills, five-and-dimes, banks, printing presses, theaters, restaurants, shoe shops, and storefronts."<sup>4</sup>

But by the early 1930s, with the coming of the Great Depression and the relocation of production out of the textile mills, which were the site of Lowell's most sustainable developments, the town faced steady economic decline well into the late 1900s. After World War II, production staggered, and in 1958, the Boott Cotton Mills ceased operations entirely. When Leo and Gabrielle Kerouac moved to Lowell in the mid-1910s from nearby Nashua, New Hampshire, they stood at the edge of Lowell's final moments of stability and its eventual decline, though for a time, they were able to etch out a relatively comfortable existence for themselves and their three children: Gerard, born in 1916, Caroline, or "Nin," 1918, and Jean-Louis, or "Ti Jean" ("Little Jean" in the French-Canadian patois of *joual*), on March 12, 1922.

During his childhood and adolescence, Kerouac's family moved several times within the neighborhoods of Lowell, which provided the young boy opportunities to intimately explore the places and communities of the town growing up, but also presented a sense of fracture, with different periods of his life coinciding with different areas of the town. Specifically, Kerouac situated the time of his early childhood in the neighborhood

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<sup>4</sup> Maher Jr., Kerouac: The Definitive Biography (Lanham, MD: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2004), 9.



of Centralville, northeast of the Merrimack River, and his adolescence in Pawtucketville, also known as “Little Canada,” north of the river canal. By the 1930s, the total population of Lowell was 100,000 people, and 30,000 of this population were of French-Canadian descent, many first and second generations.<sup>5</sup> The majority of the French-Canadian residents lived in Pawtucketville, which consisted of tenement housing along the Merrimack River for the town’s lower and working class communities, while some lived in Centralville, which provided more affluent residents in town higher elevations and smaller homes and cottages, which also instilled a sense of status and distinction.<sup>6</sup> In childhood and adolescence, Kerouac experienced both of these neighborhoods intimately, each of which retained distinct feelings related to home, family, identity, and belonging.

In this report, I argue that in his fiction, the adult Kerouac translates and transforms the historic and real place of Lowell into a personal psycho-literary space on the page, which is bound in time to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, during Kerouac’s childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. Through this reconstruction, crafted from the collusion of memories, dreams, visions, and literature, I believe that Kerouac in adulthood was ultimately striving to return to the sites and scenes of the Lowell of his youth, but would never fully satiate that desire. His Lowell, Kerouac’s Lowell, was in reality lost to time, and the only way to return and reengage with the homes, people, and communities of his past was to reconstruct a new space through literature. Thomas Wolfe, one of Kerouac’s favorite authors, titled one of his novels, *You Can’t Go Home Again*, and I believe that

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<sup>5</sup> Arthur Eno Jr., ed., *Cotton Was King: A History of Lowell, Massachusetts* (Lowell, MA: Lowell Historical Society, 1976), 255.

<sup>6</sup> Maher Jr., *Kerouac*, 10-11.

this sentiment captures the beautiful and tragic quest at the heart of many of Kerouac's novels.

For my argument, I will analyze the literary representation and reconstruction of Lowell within Kerouac's fiction, specifically in particular novels composed from 1951-1960. Many contemporary scholars and critical works have stressed the important and transformative nature of Lowell within Kerouac's biography and literature, and I believe that an intimate examination of Kerouac's own transformation of the historic place into a psycho-literary space can provide a clear map of how the author shaped and was shaped by Lowell and vice versa.

One of the most popular and well-known notions of Kerouac's character comes from his travels across the American landscape, captured in texts like *On the Road* (1957) and *The Dharma Bums* (1958), which exude a spirit of independence. But even within these novels that have cultivated concepts of American beauty behind the wheel, non-conformity, rebellious youthfulness, and ecstatic exuberance, lies another quest for future stability, life-long companionship and camaraderie, and comfort in family and work at the end of the road. In these long-winded and winding journeys across North America, characters like Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty strive to find more "life, joy, kicks, darkness, music" in their lives along the way,<sup>7</sup> but for each of them resides another desire to cultivate domestic sites represented by nice homes, a wife and children, and an eventual end to their physical and spiritual wanderings. In Kerouac's case, the Lowell of his youth embodied that immortal place of comfort, domesticity, and family, but the

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<sup>7</sup> Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York: Penguin, 1957), 180.

destination is lost to time, and all that remains are memories, dreams, and words on the page, which would never be enough to satisfy that drive in his lifetime.

In analyzing this separate quest for home in Kerouac's road narratives, as well as in the works composed during the course of the 1950s, the dramatic turn of events in his life during the 1940s cannot be overlooked. Kerouac experienced the impact of World War II on both a global scale, serving briefly at sea in the Merchant Marines, and on a local scale, losing close friends from his youth in battle, including the intellectual Sebastian Sampas, who inspired Kerouac's thirst for writing and literature. In May 1946, Kerouac also lost his father, Leo Kerouac, who died of stomach cancer. With death came life, however, and after forging literary and intellectual friendships with Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs, Kerouac met the man that would significantly change his life, Neal Cassady, in the fall of 1946. Shortly after they met in New York, the two friends began their journeys across North America, fueling Kerouac's strident fascination and infatuation with the continent, its ideologies of freedom and liberty, and his desires for more compelling writing. But even as these travels opened his eyes to new cultures and experiences, he began to feel the ramifications of these sudden losses and changes within his life, cultivating a sense of disruption and longing for a past now lost, enshrined within the place and space of Lowell.

I've chosen to look at the novels from 1951-1960 for my analysis for several reasons: 1) this period represents the most prolific time in Kerouac's writing career; 2) Kerouac began to fully realize and experiment with the recently developed concept of "spontaneous prose poetics"; and 3) beyond Kerouac's early attempts to address his past

and small town life in works like *The Town and the City* (1950), the unfinished manuscript of *The Haunted Life* (recently published in 2014), and his juvenilia, this era signaled the start of Kerouac's lifelong hopes to use his own biography and experiences as the focus and skeleton of his multi-volume saga known as "The Duluoaz Legend."<sup>8</sup> In this time, Kerouac also began to use the real place and name of Lowell, MA, in his stories rather than craft literary substitutes like the imaginary town of "Galloway," the setting for *The Town and the City* and *The Haunted Life*. Kerouac worked intensely to translate his life onto the page, and in so doing, brought along his family, friends, and associates, his history, and importantly, his hometown, reconfiguring each of these elements to serve and satisfy his hopes of return. *Visions of Gerard*, *Doctor Sax: Faust Part Three*, and even works like *Visions of Cody* and *Book of Dreams*, all of which I examine in this report, highlight the author's efforts to draw out the new space of Lowell in the borders of his books, and reposition it as his own envisioned town, which I refer to as Kerouac's Lowell.

As my analysis will show, several themes emerge when examining these particular texts side-by-side and as a whole: the reconstruction of a real place into a psycho-literary space through the overlap of dreams and memories in what Kerouac refers to as "visions"; the sense and qualities of hauntedness that erupt from those visions; and the strong emphasis on homosocial engagement and brotherhood. As Duluoaz states early on in *Dr. Sax*, "Memory and dream are intermixed in this mad universe,"<sup>9</sup> and

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<sup>8</sup> Jack Duluoaz is the protagonist and narrator in many of Kerouac's books, a literary stand-in for the author. Other fictional characters based on Kerouac include Sal Paradise (*On the Road*) and Ray Smith (*The Dharma Bums*).

<sup>9</sup> Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax: Faust Part Three* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 5.

it is through this intermixture that the concept of “visions” emerges, sparked by emotional and intellectual exploration and attachment to spaces of spirituality, domesticity, and community. These visions evoke a sense of loss and longing for characters of the recent past, which formulate themselves into “ghosts” among the literary mill town, whether the real models for these characters were dead or not at the time of Kerouac’s writing. In his novels, these apparitions resemble the literal deceased—his brother, Gerard, his father, Leo—but also the figurative deceased—his “gang,” Neal Cassady—each of whom exist within the ever-shifting boundaries of space and time in this literary Lowell.

When studying the intense intimacies of space and place in Kerouac’s Lowell, the theme of brotherhood and connectivity through space and time becomes a prominent feature of his quests. From the deceased brother in childhood, the gang in his adolescence, and finally to the complex figure of Neal Cassady in adulthood, Kerouac and his literary doppelgangers strive for unity through homosocial desire and engagement, whether through blood, kinship, sports, cars, travels, or literature. The world that Duluo and his companions occupy in Kerouac’s Lowell is driven by the force of male bonding and camaraderie. Simply by looking at the titles of Kerouac’s earliest works—the recently published unfinished manuscripts of *The Sea is My Brother* and *The Haunted Life*, as well as his first novel, *The Town and the City*—one can see these themes of place, space, and brotherhood emerging by the 1940s. They would eventually take hold by the early 1950s as Kerouac attempted to return to his past and his youth, where that sense of unity and belonging took root in the streets, among the brick buildings and

storefronts, and in the many homes scattered across the river of his Lowell. The stories of the Duluo Legend all tell a tale of questing, of searching for meaning, and that search always brings the protagonists back home, for better or worse.

To address these issues, I situate my arguments within the overlap between Kerouac studies, childhood studies, literary theory, American Studies, and geocriticism. I rely on the works of Kerouac biographers and scholars, including Paul Maher Jr. and Matt Theado, to relate the literary landscape in Kerouac's novels to the historic site of Lowell in the 1920s and 1930s. As well, I utilize Gaston Bachelard's studies on *The Poetics of Space* and *The Poetics of Reverie* to discuss the intense intimacies of Lowell in Kerouac's texts and situate the concept of "perpetual childhood" within the unconscious mind of the dreamer and artist in my analyses of the psycho-literary space.

"Geocriticism," a term coined by Bertrand Westphal and Robert Tally, Jr., is the interdisciplinary study of literary geography, focusing on the use and shaping of setting within literature as a means to communicate issues of identity, culture, political ideologies, gender and sexuality, race, and more. According to Tally, this form of study "emphasizes the ongoing interplay between text and world—the ability of literature not only to reflect the world around us or even to shape our understanding of it but also to inflect the history of the places in question in a reciprocal relationship."<sup>10</sup> Recently, the term has developed several different meanings and interpretations, and for this report, I will apply some of the evolving tenets of geocriticism to the literary cartography in Kerouac's work.

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<sup>10</sup> Robert T. Tally, Jr., ed., *Geocritical Explorations: Space, Place, and Mapping in Literary and Cultural Studies*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

In Chapter One, “‘I Was Gerard’: Centralville and *Visions of Gerard*,” I examine Kerouac’s short novel, *Visions of Gerard* (composed in 1956; published 1963), and the intimacies of home, childhood trauma, and the place and space of Centralville, the neighborhood that defined Jack Kerouac’s early years and identity. Utilizing Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space*, I examine the neighborhood of Centralville as a historic and literary site in Kerouac’s biography, emphasizing Kerouac’s first experiences of loss with the death of his older brother, Gerard; the intimacies of cultural identity and first language within the French-Canadian community; the emphasis on Catholic sin and guilt; and the transformative power and nature within and around the space of “home.” I argue that Kerouac’s intense intimacies within the space of Centralville, particularly within the spaces of his childhood homes, the local church and school, and the cemetery, forged a particular association of the neighborhood with an embodied sense of life and death, beauty and tragedy, and beatitude and sin as it relates to his relationship to his deceased brother.

In Chapter Two, “‘The Lowell of My Youth’: Pawtucketville and *Dr. Sax*,” I look at the novel *Doctor Sax* (composed 1952; published 1959), which represents the author’s late childhood and adolescence after the Kerouac family moved to the neighborhood of Pawtucketville in the early 1930s. As this novel demonstrates and my analyses show, Pawtucketville represented the earliest cultivation of Kerouac’s sense of self-identity and individuality through popular culture, literature, sports, and his own creative imagination. It also represents his first and most intimate period of camaraderie and friendship in the form of his “gang,” the small group of neighborhood boys Kerouac grew to know and

love well into his adulthood. Through play and activities with this group, Kerouac developed a desire for and dependence on homosocial interactions, which resonated throughout the rest of his life, culminating in a search for brother-like figures. These novels stress the nostalgia for this period of time in Kerouac's life, and most importantly, signify the intimate spaces and sites of maturation, friendship, sexual awakening, and the development of the body and mind through sports and literature, the two major passions in Kerouac's life.

Finally, Chapter Three, "Visions and Dreams: Questing Through Space and Time," looks at two books, *Visions of Cody* and *Book of Dreams*, which each draw distinctive connections and parallels to the town and its literary representations. *Visions of Cody* is a quasi-retelling of Kerouac's time spent on the road with Neal Cassady in the late 1940s and early 1950s, but also an intimate, experimental study of Cassady's literary doppelganger, Cody Pomeroy (Dean Moriarty in *On the Road*). In his descriptions of Cody and the places he and Kerouac visit and reside in throughout the years, the narrator seems to position Cody's childhood and adolescence alongside of his own, utilizing each of their histories and hometowns as a way to close the gap between time and space that separates their different experiences across the country, growing up in Denver and growing up in Lowell, respectively. In *Cody*, as well, the figure of the long-lost brother returns, and the narrator must contend with the ideal vision he has developed of this brother figure and the reality. To conclude, *Book of Dreams* seems to encapsulate each aspect of Kerouac's desires expressed in the previous novels—childhood trauma and loss; anxieties of maturation; nostalgia; camaraderie and homosocial desire; Catholic



guilt and sin; the manipulation of time and space; the long-lost brother—and merges them together in Kerouac's dream diaries, written between 1952-1960. Recording his dreams immediately after they occurred in a stream of consciousness manner, the book effectively captures Kerouac's adulthood desires to find his way back home into the past, forever lost to him in the real, and only accessible within the imaginary construct of memories, dreams, and visions in the psycho-literary spaces of literature.

## Chapter One:

### **‘I Was Gerard’: Centralville and *Visions of Gerard***

The neighborhood of Centralville would forever embody the most personal, complex, enlightening, and traumatic conceptions of life and death for Jack Kerouac. Jean-Louis Kerouac, nickname “Ti Jean,” was born on March 12, 1922 in his family home at 9 Lupine Road in Centralville. Within a year, the family moved a few streets down to a house on Beaulieu Street, around the corner from St. Louis de France Catholic Church, which served as the local French-Canadian church, rectory, and grammar school.<sup>11</sup> Ti Jean’s older brother, Gerard, had suffered with a bout of rheumatic fever since infancy, and after 9 long years of suffering, he passed away on June 2, 1926, in the Beaulieu Street home when Ti Jean was only 4. Gerard’s wake was held in the parlor room of this house before he was buried in the local cemetery. Within Centralville, Kerouac located the particular sites and intimate places that signified his own birthplace, as well as the final resting place of his ailing brother, all within the space of his earliest experiences and memories of childhood.

In *Visions of Gerard*, Kerouac would attempt to address the emotional trauma of Gerard’s short life and death for himself and his family, reconstructing the dark, gloomy spaces of the family home and the church to reimagine the many stories of his brother that he had heard over the years from his mother, his father, and from the community, and his own brief, singular memories of his brother. Within this short novel, written in 1956, Kerouac blends elements of the past, through memories and stories, with

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<sup>11</sup> Maher Jr., *Kerouac*, 15.

experiences of the present, particularly his engagement and study of Buddhism in the mid-1950s and his work as a writer. Growing up in a French-Canadian community, Kerouac's religious ties were married to Catholicism, but he was intensely fascinated by Buddhist tenets around transcendence, nirvana, suffering, and immateriality, and within the novel, he reconceives his real past in Lowell through the perspective and lens of holiness and the visionary, integrating the spiritual worlds of Catholicism with Buddhism in his intimate portrayal of Gerard's final years.

### **Origins of the novel**

The origins of *Visions of Gerard* date back to the winter of 1950/51 when Kerouac sent a series of long letters to friend Neal Cassady detailing Kerouac's supposed "sins" since birth. "The time has come for me to write a full confession of my life to you," he wrote in a December 28, 1950, recounting his childhood experiences in Centralville when Gerard lived and died. Many passages from the novel originate almost word-for-word from this particular letter and subsequent ones. Kerouac discusses his birth "on the second floor of a wooden house on Lupine Road," in "a strange afternoon, red as fire" as "snow dropped precipitous from their bleak wood."<sup>12</sup> He also details the short events in his "sickly" brother's life, his faint memories of the time, and the scene of Gerard's death. The letter stresses the "great similarity" between the two brothers in appearance as seen in their childhood photos, but also emphasizes a looming divide

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<sup>12</sup> Jack Kerouac, *Selected Letters: 1940-1956* (New York: Penguin, 1995), 249.

between their personalities and characters.<sup>13</sup> “My brother was a saint,” he states. Gerard supposedly communed with “little birds [that] came to his holy windowsill” as he “lay in bed,” “very ill,”<sup>14</sup> and “spoke frequently of angels and drew pictures of them,” intense visions of heaven in his head.<sup>15</sup> For Kerouac, there seemed to be no contest between himself, the “sinful” son, and the saintly figure of his brother. “I know now that I imitated him through life,”<sup>16</sup> he writes, and when Gerard was finally buried in 1926, “so ended my brother’s life and began the gloom of my life.”<sup>17</sup>

Interestingly, in this same letter, Kerouac acknowledges that most of his impressions of this time and Gerard came from stories told by his mother. “Only my mother fully knew what was going on,” he writes. “She was capable of hiding in the hall and peeking around the doorjamb to hear every dear word uttered by my little saint-brother. She reported it to me years later.” Kerouac relied on his mother’s own personal reminisces to gain a sense of understanding about his brother, whom he really didn’t know well enough to vouch for this sacredness in youth. But he did not fault her for any sort of hyperbole. “The sight of this holy child slowly dying,” he continues, “might have affected her mind at the time, and her stories about him may today be exaggerated, but I have verification, plus a pain in my heart, sufficient unto these pages.” For everyone else who knew the boy, from his father, to his aunts, “a priest in the neighborhood whose name I forget...and neighbors, and some business associates of the old man,” they “spoke in the same way about Gerard: to the effect that he was the strangest, most angelic gentle

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 251-52.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 261.

child they had ever known.”<sup>18</sup> Kerouac would take these stories and impressions of his deceased brother as fact in their strident beliefs and convictions that the young boy had been blessed, endowed with an intimacy and foresight to tap into the spiritual existences that surrounded him.

From these letters to Cassady, Kerouac began the groundwork to one day return to the site of his childhood traumas in his fiction, starting with stories of Gerard, to help excise and address the pains and joys of his youth. Even in these letters, he seems self-aware about this entire process of “confession” as literature, telling Cassady that these letters will spell out “the actual truth of my life” and that Cassady “may burn these things” if he so chooses,<sup>19</sup> but, pages later, contradicts himself and says, “of course, don’t burn anything but save for me, for my honest books of later.”<sup>20</sup> By pointing to the construction of these letters, I stress the importance in recognizing that Kerouac, while at once feeling the pains and loss of his brother in life and the desire to return to the time and place of his youth, has his eyes open to future publication in the intimacies of his “confessions,” aware of the potential content he may use, and did use, in his future novels, including *Visions of Gerard*.

### **Trauma and Beatitude in the Space of Home**

Before analyzing some of the spaces of home and community in the novel, I want to address Kerouac’s conception of “visions,” as evoked in the title (and in the title of

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 253.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 246.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 262.

*Visions of Cody*, which I will discuss in Chapter Three). “Visions of Gerard” refers to three types of perception: 1) the author’s personal perception of Gerard within the novel, which relies on an intimate reading of the character from an outside perspective; 2) Gerard’s own perceptions of the world through his eyes; and 3) the envisioned and imagined concepts of otherworldly places, such as heaven or the universe. “Visions” in particular also relate to the concepts of memories and dreams, imbued with a sense of ethereal and spiritual gazing and perception that unites the narrator’s own ideas of time and space, past and present, real and imaginary, simultaneously within the same text, or even within the same sentence. The title is the first indication that the book and story operate in a distinct space separate from our own conceptions of place in the real.<sup>21</sup>

In *The Poetics of Space*, philosopher Gaston Bachelard utilizes a phenomenological approach to focus on the ways in which physical places related to the concepts of home are experienced and communicated through poetic expressions in literature, reconfiguring the real into spaces of memories and dreams. As he states, “our house [...] is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word.”<sup>22</sup> We experience home in a multitude of ways, through the senses of sight, sound, and touch, but most importantly, as Bachelard emphasizes, we intimately interact with the space of the home within the realms of memory and dreams, which he links to his own concept of “Motionless Childhood.” “When memories of other places we have lived in come back to us,” he states, “we travel to the land of Motionless Childhood, motionless the way all

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<sup>21</sup> Developed from Matt Theado’s definitions of “visions” in *Understanding Jack Kerouac* (Columbia, SC: The University of Southern Carolina Press, 2000), 76.

<sup>22</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994),

Immemorial things are.” In this land, daydreams, or reverie, are valued most highly as they unite people with their earliest experiences of self and the universe in childhood. “The places in which we have *experienced daydreaming* reconstitute themselves in a new daydream, and it is because our memories of former dwelling-places are relived as daydreams that these dwelling-places of the past remain in us for all time.”<sup>23</sup> Bachelard’s philosophical arguments seem to address some of the poetic foundations in Kerouac’s own conceptions of “visions” through memory and dreaming, as he returns to the intimate sites of his and Gerard’s childhoods again and again, adding more dimensionalities to the scenes through each subsequent encounter and reencounter with the vision.

We can begin to explore these intense intimate spaces related to childhood in the opening scene of the novel set in Gerard’s bedroom/sickroom. We are shown “Saintly Gerard” near the end of his short life, with “the nuns of St. Louis de France Parochial School [...] at his bedside to take down his dying words because they’d heard his astonishing revelations of heaven delivered in catechism class on no more encouragement than that it was his turn to speak.” The narrator focuses on the “pure and tranquil face” of this “sickly little kid” lying in bed, with “the mournful look of him,” and explains his resolve “to keep [Gerard’s] fixed-in-memory face free of running off from me.”<sup>24</sup> Within this scene, we encounter Gerard in the intimate confines of his bedroom, already suffused with a sense of loss, sadness, and frailty, but also a sense of holiness with the presence of the nuns.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>24</sup> Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard* (New York: Penguin, 1963), 1-2.

In this same space later in the novel, within the quiet moments of the everyday, Gerard is imagined feeding birds at his window, “sow[ing] his (by Ma prepared) breadcrumbs on the sill and on the short slope roof up there where his sickroom was.” As Duluoz writes, “Gerard had birds that neighbor and relative could swear did know him personally,” reinforcing the notion that the eyes of the community were also focused on these intimate scenes and moments of the young boy’s communion with nature. But Duluoz also emphasizes the intensity of Gerard’s suffering, “when his rheum-rimmed eyes’d look out on fresh undefiled mornings like captured princesses in must towers—Vile visitations of bile’d turned him green, and white, in the night, his bedpan beneath the bed.” The room encompasses Gerard’s holiness and innocence at the window, but also his intense suffering in the objects of his bed and bedpan. For Duluoz, this sickroom was “a location for a room that forever frets my brain when in gray dreams I dream of houses, that location is always the one that makes me sink, somewhere to the north and west of misery, by peaks, mystery, gables.”<sup>25</sup> As Bachelard argued, the narrator’s dreams bring him back, again and again, to the intense sites and scenes of his own Motionless Childhood and memories, which are forever solidified in his mind.

“For the first four years of my life,” the narrator states, “while he lived, I was not Ti Jean Duluoz, I was Gerard, the world was his face, the flower of his face.” Gerard seemed to exist for Duluoz as “a kindly serious face bending over me,” but also as an embodied figure, “being me and blessing me,” permeating through the boundaries of the

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 19.



sick body and room into the younger boy.<sup>26</sup> And very much so, it is in the intensity of the attention and presence of Gerard within the home that Ti Jean so often locates himself, utilizing the essence of the stories, conceptions, and dreams he has of the deceased boy as a guide to these intimate spaces.

For Duluo as well, even as Gerard seems to embody all sense of light and blessedness, each room in the home and in the sky around are all cast in a familiar gray and gloomy existence. While these color, or colorless, choices convey the dream-like qualities of Duluo's remembrances, they can also relate to the one particular and painful memory that Kerouac and Duluo both shared of Gerard slapping the younger boy in the face. As Paul Maher Jr. states, the home on Beaulieu Street was "perhaps the single address that had the greatest significance for Kerouac" because of this distinct memory in which the supposedly angelic Gerard acts out of his ideal, holy character.<sup>27</sup> Kerouac recounts the incident to Cassidy in a letter:

Gerard sat at his erector set before the magnificent structure of his brief career: it was huge, towering, a crane of some sort, arranged and hung in strange new ways and calculated to do a thousand strange feats....But I had to come along and grab at his little arrangements: knock a subsidiary structure down, push the little wrench to the floor, whatever it was, disturbing him so suddenly that with understandable rage he impulsively tightened inside and his hand shot out and slapped me in the face. "Get away from here!" he cried. I mooned over that in the parlor. Gray vultures of gloomy day were feeding at the rooftops of time, I could see it outside the curtains. Gloom, grayness, faucet-ticking.<sup>28</sup>

In reconstructing this memory, Kerouac employs his own reading of the scene that emphasizes the perpetual divide between the older brother and the younger: Gerard

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>27</sup> Maher Jr., 14.

<sup>28</sup> Jack Kerouac, *Selected Letters*, 259.

responds with “an understandable rage” after Ti Jean “had to come along.” Kerouac seems to stress his inherent sinfulness in this instance, retrospectively giving his older brother an out for Ti Jean’s misdeeds, ensuring that the memories, stories and image of the Saintly Gerard remained intact.

In this memory as well, Kerouac eludes to the parlor room of the house, which encompasses the site and scene of Gerard’s wake. The small coffin was placed on display for relatives and neighbors to come into the home and pay their respects and condolences to the grieving family. In the novel, Duluoze remembers the “crying and jawing [...] as suddenly in my mind, as tho it was only a dream, a vision in the mind, which it is, I see the whole house and woe open up from within its every molecule.”<sup>29</sup> Reaffirming Bachelard’s claim that home acts as the first universe, the sadness permeating from the space of the parlor seems to erupt and consume the very foundations of the home as family and company wail and mourn. The house embodies the communal, as well as personal, pain.

Both Kerouac and Duluoze would return to the site of Gerard’s wake in dreams. “An old dream [...] I’ve had,” Duluoze writes, “of me glooping, that night, in the parlor, by Gerard’s coffin, I don’t see him in the coffin but he’s there, his ghost, brown ghost.” His deceased brother becomes the first apparition inside of his own psycho-literary space, haunting the remembered homes and rooms of youth. Recounting this dream, Duluoze says, “I’m grown sick in my papers (my writing papers, my bloody ‘literary career’ ladies and gentlemen) [...] the whole reason why I ever wrote at all and drew breath to bit in

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<sup>29</sup> Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 110.

vain with pen of ink [...] because of Gerard, the idealism, Gerard the religious hero.”<sup>30</sup>

The parlor dream awakens this continued anguish for the narrator, at once for the loss of his brother, but also for the persistent apparition of idealism that represents and embodies everything he can never achieve, in life or in death. As well, this construct of the ideal takes root in the mind of Ti Jean and continues to affect how he perceives others and the world around him, which will be explored in Chapter Three.

Another intimate space conveyed in the novel is St. Louis de France Church, where Gerard’s funeral is held and also where Ti Jean was baptized a few years before. In the real Lowell, the church, according to Paul Maher Jr., was “constructed of brick and granite,” which “barely topped the homes that squatted near it.” It was built as a basement-level facility with “unassuming stained-glass panels.”<sup>31</sup> The church acted as school for the Kerouac children in these years: they would walk down the street in the morning and pray and learn in the basement before returning home. The small church and the basement would become a recurring image in Kerouac’s narratives and dreams of Lowell. As Duluoz describes it in the novel:

[F]irst you see the nun’s home, and bright in the morning sun, then the gloomy edifice of the schoolhouse itself with its long-plank sorrow-halls and vast basement of urinals and echo calls and beyond the yard, with its special (I never forgot) little inner yard of cinder gravel separated from the big dirtyard [...] by a small granite wall not a foot high that everyone sits on or throws cards against.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 111-112.

<sup>31</sup> Maher Jr., *Kerouac*, 15.

<sup>32</sup> Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 24.

Duluoiz infuses the space of the church with emotions like “sorrow-halls” and a “gloomy edifice” to address the transformative space as people enter inside, but also the exterior spaces of the yards in which children occupied themselves with games.

In the funeral scene of the church, Duluoiz recounts the emotional transformations within the basement. “It seemed to me,” he states, “as the organ music played and the priest intoned in Latin at the altar far up the pews in the end of time, that Gerard, now motionless in the central presented bier at the foot of the main aisle [...] honorably mounted and all beflowered and anointed, was delivered to that Pure Land where I could never go or at least not for a long time.”<sup>33</sup> For the young boy, it seems as though Gerard, even as his body lays tranquil in his coffin at the front of the service, has left for another plane of existence, but in many ways still remains within the spaces of Duluoiz’s dreams and memories. Gerard’s essence permeates the boundaries of the church and enters into the sacred Pure Land of heaven, infusing the scene with sorrow and longing for his younger brother, but also a sense that he has found peace in the ethereal.

*Visions of Gerard* in many ways represents the intensely intimate engagements of childhood with spiritual and envisioned spaces of heaven and the universe, which relate back to Bachelard’s emphasis on reveries. In *The Poetics of Reverie*, Bachelard explores the reveries of and toward childhood, proposing that “at the center of the human psyche” lies the “nucleus of childhood.”<sup>34</sup> Bachelard believes that the earliest experiences and conceptions of the world in childhood allow for the child to tap into a “cosmic reverie,” a space of “pure memory” in which the child, daydreaming, will *know* the very essence of

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>34</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 108.

its cosmic position in and around the universe.<sup>35</sup> As the child grows, applies historical context and “facts” to situate their existences in society, they pull further away from this “cosmic” engagement since they attempt to rationalize and continue to situate their dreams in reality. He explains that “it is often late that we discover our childhood and adolescent solitudes in their depths,” solitudes which allows for the “dreaming child” to know “the cosmic reverie which unites us to our world.”<sup>36</sup> In other words, by freeing our minds from context and conscious rationalizations, each person is able to return to this period of cosmic and visionary knowing. “It is [in the nucleus of childhood] that imagination and memory are closely bound together. It is there that the being of childhood binds the real with the imaginary, that it lives the images of reality in total imagination.”<sup>37</sup> I believe that within the novel and in most of his other works, Kerouac attempts to address and return to something similar as Bachelard’s “nucleus of childhood” in his visions and writings.

Early in the novel, Duluo recounts the chance moments in which Gerard is able to leave the house and play in the yard. In one scene, Gerard is lying on the lawn outside of their home, “gazing at the white clouds passing on by.” Because of his more present personal fascination and study of Buddhism, the narrator also inserts the notion that Gerard interprets these clouds as “perfect Tao phantoms that materialize and then travel and then go.” Gerard is given a spiritual foresight to parse out the grandeur and immensity of the world through his eyes, focusing on these “phantoms” as they exist “in

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 108.

one vast planet emptiness, like souls of people, like substantial fleshy people themselves, like your quite substantial redbrick smokestacks of the Lowell Mills along the river on sad red sun Sunday afternoons” in the summer.<sup>38</sup> In this scene, we experience the co-mingling of two visionaries in one space, emphasizing Duluo’s earlier statement that in childhood, he *was* Gerard. Through the united visions of the beyond, the spiritual, within the space of the family yard, the author and narrator are able to transcend the boundaries of the real and enter into spaces that evoke this unification and oneness with the cosmic and the universal.

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<sup>38</sup> Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard*, 2.

## Chapter Two:

### “The Lowell of My Youth”: Pawtucketville and *Doctor Sax*

After the death of Gerard, the Kerouacs moved several more times within Centralville, before settling in the neighborhood of Pawtucketville in 1934. By this time in the early 1930s, hit by the Depression, Lowell was sent into “a long, steady nosedive through the rest of the decade,”<sup>39</sup> especially in the “economically depressed” neighborhood of Pawtucketville, “Little Canada.”<sup>40</sup> As well, Centralville had offered several small homes and cottages as housing, whereas Pawtucketville was made up of tenements and apartment buildings. In Centralville, the attachment to home was much stronger than in Pawtucketville, which in its layout and particular community of working class citizens, operated more as a social place.

However, for Jackie, as he was called by his new friends in Pawtucketville,<sup>41</sup> he had made a resolve to enjoy the new change, stating that he “had learned to stop crying in Centralville and I was determined not to start crying in Pawtucketville.”<sup>42</sup> Graduating from Catholic school in 1933, the young boy transferred to Bartlett, a public middle school, where he began to socialize with other French-Canadian boys his age and also learn English. He invested a large amount of time to learning the new language—reading books in English in the public library, which he continued to do well into adulthood, as well as starting a daily journal in English—so much so, that his native *joual* began to fade over time, only spoken sparingly at home. In a letter to Yvonne Le Maitre at the *Lowell*

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<sup>39</sup> Maher Jr., *Kerouac*, 29.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 28.

*Sun* dated September 8, 1950, Kerouac states that “I have no proficiency at all in my native language, and that is the lame truth.[...] The reason I handle English words so easily is because it is not my own language. I refashion it to fit French images.”<sup>43</sup> The move and the new surroundings presented young Kerouac with a chance to come into his own and cultivate relationships with other boys through social engagements.

To address the impacts of these particular changes in his life during the early 1930s, I will examine the fantastic, haunted world of Kerouac’s *Doctor Sax*. Kerouac composed the novel, *Doctor Sax: Faust Part Three*, in 1952, while living with fellow author William S. Burroughs in Mexico City. The novel had been brewing in Kerouac’s mind since at least 1948 when he first described the book as a novel about “the American Myth as we used to know it as kids.”<sup>44</sup> By 1952, with the development of his “spontaneous prose poetics,” a free-flowing style which adopted its syntactical structure from the innovative, expressionistic, and impulsive nature of Jazz and bebop music, the novel represented a fantastical *bildungsroman* on the imagined and imaginative maturation of Kerouac’s literary doppelganger, Jack Duluo, caught between the real and the fantastical within the confines and structure of fictional storytelling.

I argue that the Lowell of *Doctor Sax*—presented specifically as “Lowell, Massachusetts” in the novel—can only exist within the confines of the text because it resides in a past that Kerouac did not truly experience, but imagined and constructed through memory, evocations of childhood, dreams, and popular media like radio, magazines, and comic books. In this space, Kerouac crafts a Lowell in which memories

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<sup>43</sup> Jack Kerouac, *Selected Letters*, 226-228.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.



of the real comingle, operate with and against, and depend, and are dependent upon, the fantastic. This chapter is my attempt to highlight the valuable role that Doctor Sax, as a novel, character, and abstract time-bound space, plays in Kerouac's desire and need to build a Lowell in which he attempts to find a level of catharsis for his early experiences of loss, death, destruction, anxieties, and religious guilt. It is through the abstract and the fantastic that he hopes to find the past and reconnect with the ghosts and visions of family, friends, and his early imagined characters that haunt this space. Though I do not believe he ever found release through, and within, this text, its creation of a new imagined Lowell speaks to Kerouac's self and the reoccurring themes and motifs of his oeuvre.

The novel is situated as the second book in Kerouac's loosely conceived "Duluoze Legend" following *Visions of Gerard*. *Doctor Sax* tells not only a fictionalized version of Kerouac's own late childhood and adolescence, but a fantastical one as well, with the book heavily populated by ghoulish and gothic figures such as Count Condu, the Hungarian vampire, and his legion of goblins, wizards, giant spiders, and more. These figures of evil infiltrate and take up residence upon Snake Hill within the confines of The Castle, where they plot and plan to unleash the Great Snake of the World, an enormous serpent residing under the Earth's surface, ever-circulating and waiting to strike and consume the world around it. Young Duluoze joins forces with the shadowy figure of Doctor Sax in the hopes of stopping the snake. In the end, neither Duluoze or Sax destroy the Snake, but an enormous bird, an ancient being representing the Snake's foil, descends

from the sky and carries the creature away in its beak, back into the air as the boy and shadow watch it disappear.

In the midst of all of these supernatural occurrences, Duluoz must come to terms with his impending maturity and the abandonment of his childish antics with his “gang,” as well as his imagined characters and playthings. Ultimately, the supernatural elements of the novel are merely psychological constructions of Duluoz’s own imagination, the symbolized forces of the threatening and impending adult world. These nightmarish visions also stem from his own traumatic experiences of childhood loss, with the sudden death of his older brother, Gerard, and the emotional impact of a threatened, and threatening, landscape with the destructive flooding of Lowell, referred to as the Great Flood of 1936. It’s a complex novel that mirrors the troubled aspects of its narrator and its author’s own disturbed psyche, operating in a unique space of blurred history, biography, fantasy and fiction.

In the novel, Kerouac uses the very foundation of his hometown, particularly Pawtucketville—alluding to its many streets, buildings, storefronts, churches, and other sites—as the blueprint for his own fictionalized place. The evil inhabitants reside in the Castle atop Snake Hill, “not far,” as Duluoz describes, “from my birthplace hill Lupine Road.”<sup>45</sup> As discussed earlier, Kerouac’s family moved frequently during his childhood, from the neighborhood of Centralville, where Lupine Road was located, and Pawtucketville, where much of the action of the novel takes place, west across the Merrimack River. Although Centralville and Pawtucketville were both predominantly

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<sup>45</sup> Jack Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 191.

populated by French-Canadians, the latter brought the family much closer to the other ethnic populations in town, including Greeks, Italians, and Poles, who mostly resided in the tenement buildings. Regardless, French-Canadians made up 20% of the population in Lowell in the early twentieth century, which made Little Canada the largest residential area in town.<sup>46</sup>

This close proximity to “the tenements of Moody” helps Duluoze envision The Castle, the dwelling of the evil forces, modeled after these multi-storied tenement buildings of the real Lowell.<sup>47</sup> However, as it is revealed in the final section of the novel, the Castle runs miles deep into the ground with “an infinite number of levels,” which housed gnomes and giant spiders, and circling around it in the ground, the Great Snake of the World.<sup>48</sup> Within the novel, this Castle is both constructed by Duluoze, and also discovered, as its true immensity is foreseen in his explorations with Doctor Sax. The howls and screams emitted from the building are similar to the screams and howls of the children in the neighborhood, the various dogs, and even the inhabitants and the building itself, “a wild house” that “screeched.”<sup>49</sup> Duluoze discovers a supernatural place not altogether far removed from his real surroundings.

One distinctly recurring image in the novel is the “wrinkly tar” of a Moody Street sidewalk where Duluoze envisions members of his “gang,” the close group of neighborhood boys he met in Pawtucketville, specifically G.J. and Lousy, “always sittin” on a corner there. Duluoze stresses to himself, “dont stop to think of words when you do

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<sup>46</sup> Mary H. Blewett, *The Last Generation: Work and Life in the Textile Mills of Lowell, Massachusetts, 1910-1960* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), 5.

<sup>47</sup> Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 39.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 235.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 39.

stop, just stop to think of the picture better—and let your mind off yourself in this work.”<sup>50</sup> In conjuring up this image of the wrinkly tar corners, he demands of himself to retain this image in his head and on the page, adamant preserve this particular scene and site in his mind. From this particular spot, he is able to see the distinct sites of the neighborhood, from “the cemetery meadows and haunted ghostfields” to Riverside Street homes, moving “from this Americana of lawns and screens and Emily Dickinson hidden schoolteachers behind lace blinds into the raw drama of the river.”<sup>51</sup> The nature of Pawtucketville and portions of Downtown along the river canal is centered among the streets and social haunts of the town and Duluoz does his best to reimagine it all.

Within the figure of Doctor Sax and the other supernatural residents of The Castle, there is a distinct level of xenophobia and stereotyping associated with their places of origin, their appearance, and practices. As Sax describes to young Duluoz, he has encountered and adopted many mystic and shamanistic tendencies, flavoring his creations with the touch of the exotic and otherworldliness. In conversation with Duluoz, Sax tells the young boy that he’s “been all over the world son, from one part of it to another,” frequenting foreign and exotic places like Peru, Lima, working alongside “some Indian or other type witch doctorin bastards to go into some mud alley in back of suspicious looking sewer holes dug in the ground,” and other spaces inhabited by mystical stereotypes.<sup>52</sup> The inhabitants of the Castle, as well, are exotic caricatures, ghouls originating from places in South America, Asia, and other locales unfamiliar to

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 5-6.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 214.

young Duluo. Many of these caricatures and stereotypes come from the pulp magazine stories and issues of *The Shadow* that Kerouac had read in his youth. Several of *The Shadow*'s foes are foreign and supernatural gangsters or shysters like Shiwan Khan, The Voodoo Master, and The Prince of Evil, foreign enemies that informed Kerouac's own creation of Count Condu and his minions.

However, there is also a deep-seated alienation within the Lowell communities themselves. Within the novel, Duluo frequently points to the nationalities and ethnicities of his "gang," the Pawtucketville neighborhood boys modeled after Kerouac's own Lowell friends. Some of them, like G.J., portrayed as "a Greekly tragic" boy by Duluo,<sup>53</sup> were from "the enemy camp," which included "Thebans, Greeks, Jews, Niggers, Wops, Irishmen," and "Polocks." "I thought Greeks were raving maniacs before," he continues, his mind changed by his encounters and close friendship with G.J.<sup>54</sup> The fusion between reality and fantasy through racial and ethnic stereotypes helps situate the historical aspects of Kerouac and Duluo's biographies within psychological boundaries where Kerouac's Lowell is situated.

### **The Great Flood of 1936**

The historical impact of the Great Flood of 1936 factors both into the real and the fictional construction of the mill town. The Great Flood struck a large section of New England, 12 states in total, as a combination of torrential rain and the erratic fluctuation between freezing and thawing of several major rivers, including the Merrimack running

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 16.

through Lowell, hit cities and towns along their edges, resulting in the destruction of many homes and businesses and nearly 200 reported deaths. In Book Five, “The Flood,” Duluoz recounts his own experience as the Merrimack River begins to rise and “roar,” sounding an impending destruction. As the waterline edges up the rocky cliff sides, Doctor Sax, who frequently resides along the shore, “uttered a low laugh beneath the roar of waters and stepped closer to the edge. ‘Now a flood will bring the rest,’ he prophesied,” predicting that more evil forces will converge on the town washed down from the North.<sup>55</sup> Duluoz notes that at first he was not troubled by the flood, which had already begun to strike around the edges of the river. In fact, he and his “gang” gleefully wait for “a real flood” to strike, wishing that the workmen, diligently piling sandbags to cordon off the flooded zones of town, “would go away.” When the flood breaks through the sandbags and they see “the great snake hump roar of the river” run free, they look at each other “in astonishment and impossible glee: IT HAD BEEN DONE!”<sup>56</sup>

However, the impact of the flood as it begins to consume homes, businesses, and lives, including several children, and continues to emit its “mighty roar beneath the bridge,” Duluoz is finally frightened by the destruction.<sup>57</sup> As it is geographically, the Merrimack River and its flooding are crucial to the psychological landscape of Lowell within the novel. Its natural raging ebbs and flows contribute to a symbolic emulation of Duluoz’s imagined Great World Snake, an ambiguous creature that nonetheless can be viewed as a representation of Time, the ever-flowing, ceaseless, and often frightening

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 155.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 172.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 179.

figure of growing up and growing into a new stage of life, outside of the privacy and care of childhood. Despite the childhood traumas that plagued both Duluoaz and Kerouac, childhood is still a place in time and space in which there is the supposed encapsulation of the self, one's character and truth, intimacy with one's creative passions, and parental dependency and doting. In the novel, the flood symbolizes the impending confrontation between Duluoaz, his kindred spirit of Doctor Sax, and the evil occupants of The Castle, the grotesqueries and frightening figures of the outside world and adulthood.

### **Doctor Sax**

The figure of Doctor Sax was modeled after the character of Lamont Cranston, a.k.a. The Shadow, who was first introduced on the airwaves in 1930 as the narrator of the radio program, *Detective Story*. From that time, the character eventually garnered his own self-titled publication written by Walter Gibson, as well as a radio serial narrated by Orson Welles. In *The Shadow*, audiences experienced a combination of "hard-boiled detective fiction with supernatural mystery," and provided the sinister image of a man adorned with a black suit, black hat, and distinctive cape draped around his shoulders.<sup>58</sup> Fiona Paton, in her essay, "Reconceiving Kerouac: Why We Should Teach *Doctor Sax*," analyzes the unique relationship between Sax and The Shadow, highlighting Duluoaz's self-awareness that his own character is a construction, though Sax is still treated as "a real personage."<sup>59</sup> Duluoaz "often emphasizes [Doctor Sax's] fictionality and makes clear the process of his evolution from *The Shadow Magazine*. By doing so, he reminds the

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<sup>58</sup> Fiona Paton, "Reconceiving Kerouac: Why We Should Teach *Doctor Sax*," in *The Beat Generation: Critical Essays*, ed. Kostas Myrsiades (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 135.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 136.

reader that Doctor Sax is a fictional construct by both the author and the narrator, thus undermining one of the crucial aspects of fantasy literature: its alternative world should be consistently maintained to convey the fantastical as real.<sup>60</sup>

The role of Doctor Sax within the novel is to eventually act as a hero and guide for the young Duluoz, although his presence and intentions remain elusive and mysterious throughout the text. Sax is a mysterious, seemingly frightening, shadow world traveler of the night who nonetheless works for the powers of good, and whose goal is to combat the evil forces at work within Lowell and The Great Snake of the World, hidden beneath the town. Lowell, as a psychological construct of Duluoz's own psyche, provides a space by which Doctor Sax is able to dwell within the shadows and on the periphery of Duluoz's sight. A self-proclaimed "phantom of the night," Sax flits and meanders through the dark cracks and alleys of the town, revealing himself only when he chooses to do so.<sup>61</sup> These dark, secretive spaces are the unconscious world of Duluoz's mind: this conception of Lowell forms a mental construction by which Sax becomes the elusive figure and repository of creation and imagination for the young boy.

### **Mass Media Consumption**

As depicted by the construction of Doctor Sax from Kerouac and Duluoz's shared interest in the commodities of *The Shadow*, the consumption of mass and popular media presents another interesting aspect in the novel. According to Jon Savage in his book, *Teenage: The Prehistory of Youth Culture, 1875-1945*, by the late nineteenth century and

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 136-37.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 194.



into the first few decades of the twentieth century, with the rise of urbanization and industrialization, and a growing sense of independence among adolescents, predominantly immigrants in urban areas, “American youth associated independence with spending,”<sup>62</sup> as well as consumption of new products and commodities like magazines, music, and film, all of which impact the life of Jack Duluo and Jack Kerouac.

By the 1920s, Lowell also adopted popular media like radios and theaters, which played a large role in young Kerouac’s imagination and creative output. Leo Kerouac’s role as printer and theater reviewer for local French publications allowed young Kerouac free access and admission to new films and productions in the local theater. In *Doctor Sax*, Duluo recalls his experience of seeing the Marx Brothers, in person as they came through town in 1927, and then again in 1934 “on the screen” in *Animal Crackers*. He and his friend Joe watched from “the dark balcony,” and “sat transfixed by this picture of our joint dreams.”<sup>63</sup> While Kerouac was fortunate to not have to work or provide for his family amidst the Great Depression, he retained this notion of an adolescent independence, allowed to freely move in and around public spaces like the theater, the print shop, and the various storefronts that supplied the latest issues of pulp fiction, including *The Shadow*. Clearly, the exposure and introduction to these mass media

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<sup>62</sup> Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Prehistory of Youth Culture, 1875-1945* (New York: Penguin, 2007), 119. Also consult Sarah E. Chinn’s *Inventing Modern Adolescence: The Children of Immigrants in Turn-of-the-Century America* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009).

<sup>63</sup> Kerouac, *Doctor Sax*, 110.

productions greatly fostered a desire in Kerouac to create and imagine his own characters and stories.

## Haunted

One of the crucial elements in this plethora of ghostly and haunting experiences of the novel is the notion that Doctor Sax, or some prototypical figure along the same lines, originated from the nightmares and traumatic events of Duluoz's past. "Doctor Sax," Duluoz states, "I first saw in his earlier lineaments in the early Catholic childhood of Centralville—deaths, funerals, the shroud of that, the dark figure in the corner when you look at the dead man coffin." Doctor Sax emerged from Duluoz's anxieties of death, a lesson first gleaned from the early experiences of his older brother, Gerard's, death. Gerard Duluoz is a model for Kerouac's own deceased brother, Gerard, who, as mentioned in chapter one, died in 1926 at the age of nine after a long bout with Rheumatic fever.<sup>64</sup> In *Doctor Sax*, Gerard appears in a dream in which Duluoz imagines "the rattling red living room" of his childhood home, "newly painted a strange 1929 varnished red" "all dancing and rattling like skeletons" because it is haunted by the ghost of Gerard.<sup>65</sup> Kerouac's creations and his imagined Lowell originate from a place of despair and trauma, as do its inhabitants.

Much of the novel draws upon supernatural and even frightening imagery that is connected to Kerouac and Duluoz's Catholic upbringing. Lowell is shrouded in a "gloomy" cloud painted grey and the ultimate threat of the Great Snake of the World is

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<sup>64</sup> The story of Gerard's death is retold and reimaged in Kerouac's novel, *Visions of Gerard* (New York: Penguin, 1963).

<sup>65</sup> *Doctor Sax*, 5.

continually there, waiting for its moment to be unleashed. In the first section of the novel, Duluoz runs through a list of childhood fears and frightening experiences, which included the belief that a statue of Ste. Therese had turned “its head at me,” as a similar statue had done in a 1920s film shown by his Catholic School. Another nightmare was that “Jesus or the Virgin Mary” had “stooped with phosphorescent profile and horror pushing my bed” one night. Duluoz remarks, “I knew I was haunted but said nothing.”<sup>66</sup> He is bombarded with these images and negative experiences, and he keeps them to himself, solidifying the novel as a space for what has never been expressed, and which lies within the author, and narrator’s, mind.

Though I stated that the Lowell within the novel is impossible, I do not mean that Lowell as it stands today doesn’t exist in strikingly similar fashion as portrayed in the text. Many of the buildings and sites—including the Grotto, a large stone hill hollowed out and filled with ceremonial candles lit every day by the Catholic community, featuring a statue of the Virgin Mary and twelve encased statues representing the stations of the cross, which lead up to and ascend toward the monument on top of Jesus Christ on the cross—are still there. These foundations are very much real. The impossible part is that of Lowell as Kerouac remembers and envisions it in his texts. It’s no longer populated by his younger selves, his gang, his family and associates. It no longer has the exact same colors, flavors, scents, or texture as it did in his past. The only way to access *this* Lowell, *Kerouac’s* Lowell, is to glean from his novels and poetry a mere semblance of this lost Lowell. It has reality behind it, but it is not in essence real.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 4-5.

By the end of the novel, Duluoz must part ways with his guide, Doctor Sax, but he departs with much more knowledge and awareness than before. In a sense, he has grown up. Doctor Sax tells Duluoz,

“Fear not the green loss—every twig in your cerebular tree is aching to return to you *now*. No particular loss is there in the use of the loss—by same token no gain by use of gain, habit gain, habit loss—all and every moment is yearning to stay grown to you even as the pee-rade passes it—you’ll take up your place in the hierarchical racks of vegetabalized heaven with a garland of carrots in your hair and still you won’t know you ever suffered such sweet wishes—in your death you’ll know the *death* part of your life. And re-gain all that green, and browns.”<sup>67</sup>

Almost a prophetic notion of Kerouac’s eventual studies in Buddhism in late 1952 into 1954, Doctor Sax’s sentiments to young Duluoz are that, though he has seen and experienced death, aware of his own mortality and future path into the stressful, often uninviting, world of adulthood, Duluoz will retain a sweet notion of organic life, seeds of joy and happiness, images of life lost, but life also lived. It’s an invocation of childhood as preserved in the mind and body, which will reawaken in heaven, offering its riches and nourishments anew. Many of Kerouac’s novels evoke this similar sense of reawakening to life, though they are all mired in that sense of loss and gloom, as featured in the novel discussed here. By relaying these old fears, filtering reality or memories through dreams and fantasy into a final, fictional product, Kerouac’s personal anxieties are manifested, but also combated on the page, within his lost, but not forgotten, Lowell.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 204.

## Conclusion

While Kerouac's Lowell is not inherently safe, the emphasis on, and the heightening of, the fears and anxieties in the novel provide the opportunity to transmit these nightmares outward to the readers, allowing the creator to breathe and release the turmoil of his own personal traumas. As Maud Mannoni notes in *Separation and Creativity*, "the transposition of trauma onto an Other stage through writing can have a liberating effect" on the author. "The external threat thus becomes the reflection of a threatened internal world; the writer perceives a part of himself as if it concerned someone else, and time is canceled out to the point where it merges with space." Kerouac's construction of Lowell in the novel, along with the supernatural forces, and the presence of Duluo, the literary doppelganger, himself, allow him an avenue to excise these childhood and adolescent nightmares into a new arena: literature. "The feeling of strangeness no longer arises once the boundaries between fantasy and reality are unclear and we enter the domain of fiction."<sup>68</sup> Lived history or memory and fantasy are fused together into a final product that is tangible and becomes its own space itself, the published manuscript or book. It also does not alleviate the creator from his own nightmares—many more books after Kerouac's death can be considered further instances of wrestling with personal trauma, despair, and alienation—but it becomes a way in which those nightmares are made concrete, built from language itself on the page. As the narrator explains in the beginning of the novel, the only way to access this version of Lowell is through memory and dreams, specifically his own. This version of Lowell is

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<sup>68</sup> Maud Mannoni, *Separation and Creativity: Refinding the Lost Language of Childhood* (New York: Other Press, 1999), 10-11.

founded upon word-bricks, paragraph-walls, and narrative-blueprints, all of which are erected through Kerouac's own imaginative storytelling and reflection upon his lived past.

### Chapter Three:

#### Visions and Dreams: Questing Through Space and Time

On December 23, 1950, Neal Cassady sent Kerouac a long, extensive letter—nearly 13,000 words according to Kerouac—in which the younger man details his sexual experiences in Denver in the winter of 1946, focused primarily on a woman named Joan Anderson. The infamous "Joan Anderson letter" was lost to time, but its importance and impact as inspiration for Kerouac's future writing career cannot be stressed enough. In the same December 28 letter in which Kerouac gives his "full confession" about Gerard and his own childhood, he states that Cassady's letter was a "great work," and that in writing out his life story, his confession is "almost and certain more than almost in direct challenge to your colossal achievements" in dynamic storytelling. "We are now contending technicians in what may well be a little American Renaissance of our own," Kerouac continues, "and perhaps a pioneer beginning for the Golden Age of American Writings."<sup>69</sup> While the final sentiments may come from self-aware hyperbole, Kerouac's belief in this new form of life-drawn, honest and dynamic prose developed on the eve of "brother Neal's" letter is real, impacting the composition of all of his subsequent works, including the scroll manuscript of *On the Road*, written and completed three months later in April 1951.

While Kerouac believed he had written "a great book, my very best one of the best to be published this year anywhere,"<sup>70</sup> the manuscript was rejected by his editor Robert Giroux, who told Kerouac that he needed to extensively revise the book into a

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<sup>69</sup> Kerouac, *Selected Letters*, 247.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 318.

more manageable form. Frustrated with the news and facing personal financial and legal troubles, Kerouac nonetheless began work on "re-writing ROAD" in the fall of 1951 and came away with a wholly new book, which would eventually become "Visions of Neal," later changed to *Visions of Cody*.<sup>71</sup> In his preface to the novel, Kerouac states that "instead of just a horizontal account of travels on the road, I wanted a vertical, metaphysical study of Cody's character and its relationship to the general 'America.'" "This is a youthful book," he continues, "and it was based on my belief in the goodness of the hero and his position as an archetypal American Man."<sup>72</sup>

In this chapter, I will examine Kerouac's *Visions of Cody* and the ways in which Kerouac, directly or indirectly, situates his own experiences and visions in cities such as New York, San Francisco, Mexico City, and most importantly, Denver, Cassady's hometown, alongside and with his own growing up in Lowell. What comes in the novel are brief moments that nonetheless spell out the narrator's belief in Lowell as another fascinating metropolis, offering similar sites and sounds on a more intimate and intense level to its counterparts. As well, he tries to capture the complexities of his friend's character as shaped by Denver and America writ large, once again conflating time and space to bring the two wanderers, near brothers, closer.

After examining *Cody*'s use of space, I will also look at one of Kerouac's other challenging and experimental works, *Book of Dreams*. The book stems from the dream journals Kerouac kept for nearly six years, comprised of "eleven handwritten notebooks totaling a staggering 1,955 pages," which Kerouac would retype and compress into a

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 326.

<sup>72</sup> Jack Kerouac, *Visions of Cody* (New York: Penguin, 1972), iii.



book-length manuscript for publication by 1960.<sup>73</sup> Like Kerouac's other autobiographical works, he used pseudonyms in place of real names of the living counterparts, but unlike the other novels that make up The Duluoz Legend, including *Cody*, its position as part of the whole is often contested. Nonetheless, Kerouac believed *Book of Dreams* to be an integral part of his literary saga, the chaotic collusion of all of the characters, places, and periods of his life in a similar dream-memory intermixture as found in Doctor Sax. I believe that *Dreams*, along with the passages from *Cody*, capture the effort to reconfigure and reimagine the place of the real and offer a new complex imaginary space: the psycho-literary space of Kerouac's Lowell as it relates to the American continent.

### *Visions of Cody*

The novel is constructed as several parts similar to *Dr. Sax*, each of which address different facets of Cody's character and utilize different writing techniques. In the first section, Duluoz employs the technique of "sketching," which relies on observations and deconstructions of a particular scene or place in relatively short passages to quickly evoke the details of the world around him. Duluoz wanders through New York City in the early 50s, returning to the sites and scenes of Cody's first time to the city from his hometown of Denver, such as a local diner, movie theater, the subway, and more.

On the subway, Duluoz takes note of an older woman sitting down, who is "looking oddly French-Canadian, like an aunt of mine." "Actually," he continues, "she wears low-cut green sexy dress under red coat with big girlish buttons (like a little

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<sup>73</sup> Maher Jr., *Kerouac*, 285.

Pawtucketville girl at afternoon novenas)."<sup>74</sup> Within the city, DuluoZ not only tries to experience the old haunts of Cody's past, but also in his own way, reflect on similarities he sees of his own past knowledge of particular Lowell characters and characteristics.

One such site includes a building, "ancient red--1880 redbrick--three stories," with "ornaments and blueprint lights inside that reminds me of eternity." He notes "going down black stairs like fire escapes to eat supper in the dungeon of Time underneath just a few feet over the Snake--and Doctor Sax clammers over the wallsides as night falls, with his suction cups."<sup>75</sup> Years after Sax had occupied the spaces of his adolescent mind of Lowell, DuluoZ conjures him up again, still lurking and searching within the shadows, ever-watchful of the Great World Snake. Elements of his imaginary construct of Lowell begin to funnel into his adulthood experiences outside of the mill town like memories.

One of the biggest influences in Kerouac's construction of the DuluoZ Legend is Proust and his own multi-volume novel, *In Search of Lost Time*. Within Proust, we are presented with scenes and locations of the narrators past and present, sometimes shifting altogether through space and time to return to particular moments, particular scenes of emotional resonance. The classic example is when Marcel the narrator eats a tea-soaked Madeleine cookie, which unlocks distant and forgotten memories of his childhood home and spaces in Combray. DuluoZ, encountering a decrepit rectory, with old Gothic windows, bare fence posts, and concrete crosses, states that "this is certainly nothing like Proust's Combray Cathedral, where the stone moved in eccentric waves, the cathedral

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<sup>74</sup> Kerouac, *Visions of Cody* (New York: Penguin, 1972), 11.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

itself a great refractor of light from 'outside.'" <sup>76</sup> The next line then jumps to more "poor old ladies of Lowell" coming out of nearby five-and-ten shops as if recalled from his own Proustian past, lacking the grandiosity of Combray, but still his own. <sup>77</sup> The narrative, as seen in *Visions of Gerard* when discussing the impact of his deceased brother's idealism, speaks in on itself, addressing the concerns of the narrator/author's present as he addresses situations of the past.

Later in the first section, as Duluo's explorations slowly turn into memories and dreams of his and Cody's pasts, he describes an "exciting perfect dream" he has on a three-story tenement porch, "like Moody Street above Textile Lunch porch." <sup>78</sup> In the dream, he heads out from the city by way of Lowell roads like Mt. Vernon or Crawford Street and is lead to the "pines of 'North Lowell,'" and the new way transforms into "hills where I did some dream-sliding and actual three-year-old real-life-rolling on wheels." In this reverie, he briefly recalls another dream in which the "spectral Pawtucketville two weeks ago who sprouted Lowell-center skyscrapers." <sup>79</sup> The city and the town at once inform Duluo's dreamscapes and also begin to affect each other's very foundation and infrastructure in his mind.

Each of these dreams finally return Duluo back to his subject at hand, his friend Cody Pomeray, who appears in another dream set in Brooklyn. "Suddenly," Duluo recalls, "the Brooklyn Bridge was burning" as "an orgy was going on" in an "old eighteenth-century brick house." All of these scenes confuse Cody, who "understood only

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 33.

Frisco and those soaring wild white house hills where my father once lived and rejected me" after interrupting a night of gambling as a child.<sup>80</sup> Preparing for the fast-shifting scenarios of *Book of Dreams*, Duluo's recollection of the dream with Cody sends him back to a particular moment in his own past far from the site of the city chaos into an old cellar full of gamblers, his father included, whom he disrupts and annoys in his childlike play. After this memory is triggered, Duluo's says that in the dream, he "not only took care of Cody's understanding but protected him from horrors which he, unlike me, was not capable of absorbing" in his "strange, childlike nature."<sup>81</sup> The scenes of Duluo's dream and memory evoke a similar feeling of horror, which prompts him to shield Cody, four years younger than himself (Cassady was born in 1926), as if he were his guardian or older brother.

And in fact, in a letter to Cody by the end of the first section, Duluo calls out to his friend, longingly and intimately, as if communing with a brother-like figure from his past. "Cody, you are, I believe, my last remaining complete great pal--I don't think I'll ever have another like you." In this same letter, he writes, "I'm completely your friend, your 'lover,' he who loves you and digs your greatness completely--haunted in the mind by you."<sup>82</sup> The intense intimacy of this letter recalls a similar hauntedness and obsession by the figure of Gerard, and as one Kerouac scholar states, "it's possible to imagine how Visions of Gerard and Visions of Cody are, in fact, one single vision."<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>83</sup> Alan Taupier, Brian Foye, and the Lowell Public Library, *Jack Kerouac's Lowell*, Web, Accessed November 13, 2014, <http://ecomunity.uml.edu/jklowell/index.html>.

In the second section of the novel, in which Duluoze reconstructs the story and character of Cody's past growing up in the pool halls of Denver, the narrator writes as if the younger boy's history is related to his own. "The son of a Larimer Street wino," the young boy Cody seems to materialize in the pool halls of Denver out of nowhere in the time during World War II. "Where he came from nobody knew or at first cared."<sup>84</sup> Cody at once seems to simply exist in Duluoze's conception, and embodies for him the "face of a great hero," like "Robert E. Lee, young Whitman, young Melville."<sup>85</sup>

Cody's appearance was also "the lonely appearance of a boy on a stage which had been trampled smooth in a number of crowded decades."<sup>86</sup> Building off of Cassady's own myth of being born on the side of the road, Duluoze envisions the boy's parents driving "on the road...the road that sorrowed into the darkness and huge unbelievable American nightland like an arrow," before Cody was born.<sup>87</sup> This vision could relate to the concept of the spiritual cosmos as experienced in *Gerard*, as well, evoking a sense of spiritual birthing from the dark. Duluoze seems to lament the vision of Cody's mother, who died shortly after the small family came to live in Denver. He even mentions that Cody "grew up with a childhood vision of her standing in the strange antique light of 1929." She was "in some kind of livingroom with beads hanging from the door," potentially from an old, early memory of Cody's past.<sup>88</sup>

In each of these images and stories of Cody's past, Duluoze seems to evoke not only the character Cody would grow up to be in adulthood, but also this intimate

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<sup>84</sup> Kerouac, *Visions of Cody*, 47.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 50.

similarity and familiarity of the boy's lonely past to his own, as well as Gerard's. These three figures, seemingly disconnected brothers through time, space, and circumstance, are each endowed with, in Duluo's conceptions at least, a story of early trauma, an aching loneliness and longing for something more and beyond, and visions locked in childhood and childlike reverie.

In reality, Kerouac's own encounters and interactions with Cassady throughout the rest of his life could never quite match the ideal American Man of the Road he had crafted on the page. Cassady, already a married man with children by the early 1950s, at once seemed to desire the intimacies of domestic life with wife Carolyn and his son and daughter, but continued on with his raucous traveling adventures well into the 60s. Cassady became Speed Limit, the driver of the day-glo school bus, Further, owned by author Ken Kesey, who led a trek across America with his Merry Pranksters from California to New York. Kerouac and Cassady's paths would continue to cross for some time, but eventually, Kerouac grew tired of Cassady's antics and associates.

The endings to both *On the Road* and *Visions of Cody* seem to evoke a similar sense of loss with the departure of the Cassady figure. However, by the end of *On the Road*, Sal is still awed and amused by Dean, even after his abandonment in their final trip to Mexico. "I think of Dean Moriarty," he states, longingly.<sup>89</sup> Whereas, by the end of *Cody*, Duluo believes that brother Cody has "died," figuratively, as he drifts in and out of the lives of those who love him, including Duluo. "I'm a fool," he writes, "I not only

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<sup>89</sup> Kerouac, *On the Road*, 307.

accept loss forever, I am made of loss--I am made of Cody, too."<sup>90</sup> In a sense, Duluoz loses yet another brother with whom his sentiments and attachments had united him to the beat and pulse of the road. "Adios, King," he concludes,<sup>91</sup> as he is left with the memories and dreams conjured up from his past and present, inhabited by the ghosts and apparitions of his own lost characters.

### ***Book of Dreams***

In the foreword to *Book of Dreams*, Kerouac describes the construction of the book and his dream writing process: "[T]his is just a collection of dreams that I scribbled after I woke up from my sleep--They were all written spontaneously, nonstop, just like dreams happen." He believes that the power of the book lies in "the fact that everybody in the world dreams every night," which "ties all mankind together shall we say in one unspoken Union and proves that the world is really transcendental which the Communists do not believe because they think their dreams are 'unrealities' instead of visions of what they saw in their sleep."<sup>92</sup> Again, this unity recalls Bachelard's conception of reverie toward childhood, the nucleus of childhood resting in the human psyche. As Kerouac stated in the preface to *Visions of Cody*, in relating his intentions for the book, these collection of dreams seem to stand-in for something more. Cody resembled the archetypal American Man, and these dream "scribblings" seem to correlate to a sense of transcendent unity that nonetheless do not transgress political ideologies. In the pages of

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<sup>90</sup> Kerouac, *Visions of Cody*, 397.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 398.

<sup>92</sup> Kerouac, *Book of Dreams* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2001), xv.

his journals and within the landscape of his dreams, his characters operate amongst the backdrop of a strong idealism and unity through transcendental thought.

As discussed in the previous chapters, major themes emerge from these passages related to hauntedness, the visionary, and brotherhood. The architecture and cartography of Kerouac's Lowell within the narrator's dreams allows the boundaries of other novels to converge, blending and blurring time and space. In this convergence, characters such as G.J. and Scotty from *Dr. Sax* are able to exist in the same warped space as Cody Pomeray and Gerard. While the dream matrices do not offer autonomous control over the scenes as the author conceives them in his unconsciousness, the conscious recording and translation of them in waking moments onto the page provides him with a chance to shrink and expand the world as he sees fit.

In one dream, Duluoiz is “back in Lowell but dismally trying to work” on “Beat Generation,” alluding to a play Kerouac wrote in 1958 (recently published in 2005). When Duluoiz receives word someone might publish the play, he travels to San Jose to “tell this to Nin and Irwin Garden [Allen Ginsberg] and Evelyn [Carolyn Cassady] but Cody’s asleep and doesn’t care.” Duluoiz situates his sister amongst his separate set of characters miles away from her home. Almost immediately he is back in Lowell, when he sees “good old G.J., but there’s a dismay, a cloud, it’s that warm radiant Lowell where I’m back and I’ve been everywhere and I use Lowell to back up my dreams which isn’t what it’s for—helplessness, wrong choice.”<sup>93</sup> Although it’s unclear what he means by using Lowell “to back up my dreams,” this sense of helplessness could relate to a

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 256.



particular guilt of relying on his hometown as the backbone of his literary dreams, the very utilization of his youthful history in the town as the setting of his fictions.

Nevertheless, this passage demonstrates how he encounters characters outside of their usual places as he drifts to-and-fro across the continent.

An early dream passage in *Book of Dreams* begins "IN SAN JOSE NOW," Duluo "riding the yellow local Lowell bus home to Pawtucketville [...] to corner (wrinkly tar)," now located "on Riverside instead of Moody" due to the "new superhiway" running through town. Suddenly, the bus riders encounter "a dirty gray Fellaheen dog" stalking the streets, forcing the bus to "run backwards across Moody to avoid it," until Duluo sees G.J. again in the "NOW" of morning in 1952, "complaining that Scotty or somebody is still the same old Scotty."<sup>94</sup> As this fragmented piece demonstrates, the world within Duluo's dreams rushes through unstable times and spaces, unhinged from the concrete sensibilities of the real. Even in minor details about the location of the "wrinkly tar" corner, an iconic spot in the space of *Dr. Sax*, the geography is warped, the corner no longer on Moody but another street altogether. He also encounters G.J., his old friend, in the "NOW" of 1952, seemingly pulled from the dream-memory corner of the past and into the narrator's present or at least more recent past.

In another dream, Duluo unites the disparate locations of his continental travels together with the site of Lowell to create a new fusion, a new sense of the past. He is "in Mexico City with Cody but there's a wild Kearney Square just like and in fact Lowell."

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

The two very different settings converge, allowing "strange dark faces like the faces of Armenians or Syrians but really Mexicans" to exist in this conception of Lowell, among "the corner of Merrimack and Bridge," now doused in "the neons" of "soft deep colors like blood red, night blue, ink pink, jade green." "I'm so amazed that Lowell and Mexico City are the same," he comments.<sup>95</sup> In his travels in the late 40s and into the 50s, Kerouac had gone to Mexico City several times and felt a familiarity of place between his hometown and the Mexican city. As Maher states, "Kerouac viewed the fellaheens of Mexico as similar to those who toiled in the mills and factories of Lowell; both groups worked with their hands to subsist."<sup>96</sup> With these apparitions comes the familiar "othering" and abstract presence of different racial groups, now existing amongst the blended landscape of "Lowell Mexico City." Duluo is taken in by this strange, but almost romantic, blur of the "incredibly dense, soft, dark, rich Spanish night or Indian night or New World City night" in the familiar spaces of home with Cody.<sup>97</sup>

And as the plight of the world rested on the site of Lowell in *Dr. Sax*, in another dream, the narrator envisions a scene of cataclysmic destruction. "Over Snake Hill," he states, "there's a remnant of a comet just exploded with yellow lights spilling and falling some en masse in sprightly groups straight down like angels falling." He fears that "they'll not dissolve before they reach the earth and crash into this silent Phebe Sleep for Holocaust and Armageddon,"<sup>98</sup> evoking the familiar sense of erasure with the Great

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 252-253.

<sup>96</sup> Maher, *Kerouac*, 35.

<sup>97</sup> Kerouac, *Book of Dreams*, 252.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 170.

Flood in *Dr. Sax* and the Great World Snake below. Again, Lowell presents itself as the great space, in which the world's fate and future will be decided.

But in all of these dreams and visions, the narrator is drawn back once more to the visions of Gerard in the parlor room. "One awful central scene," Duluo<sup>99</sup> writes, "it's in the parlor brown and funeral and coffin-like, Gerard is dead in his coffin and all my writings are racked like candle flickers in a file box by the stuffed sofa in the suffocant gloom dark, literary writing in my brother's tomb." In this "room of death," the narrator confronts yet again the traumatic spaces of his Centralville past, now laying down alongside his deceased brother as he writing looms off to the side.<sup>99</sup> It's as if the efforts to excise the tragedy of his past, housed within the spaces of the Beaulieu Street parlor, through his writing, have failed, and he remains haunted by the ideal form of his brother, representative of the boy he could not become.

Ultimately, in each of Kerouac and Duluo<sup>99</sup>'s visions through dreams and memories, the site of Lowell at once becomes a space haunted by the ghosts of the past, but also the space in which the author felt most intensely tied to family, friends, and community. In a letter to Stella Sampas, sister to his deceased friend Sebastian and by 1966, Kerouac's third wife, Kerouac expresses his desires to one day come back to the town and "make a home," ostensibly with Stella, but more importantly, to reenter locations of his youth:

[...] [N]othing can prevent me from returning to Lowell, and revisiting the house where I was born, Lupine Road, Centralville; and the house where

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 116-117.

my brother died; in the night I can return to Lowell and walk all I please  
those hallowed streets of life.<sup>100</sup>

For Kerouac, a return to Lowell signified an opportunity to reengage with sites and scenes of his past, and in this instance, also expresses a desire to reestablish an old connection in a new way, a way that might provide comfort, stability, and ease for a weary world traveler. Kerouac could never satisfy this urge to return in his lifetime—he attempted to make a home in Lowell with Stella and his ailing mother by 1966, but quickly moved back to St. Petersburg, Florida, where he died in October, 1969—but what remains in his fiction are the innumerable attempts to remember and reconstruct the town of his past, his own personal Lowell, situated on the page as a psycho-literary space in time.

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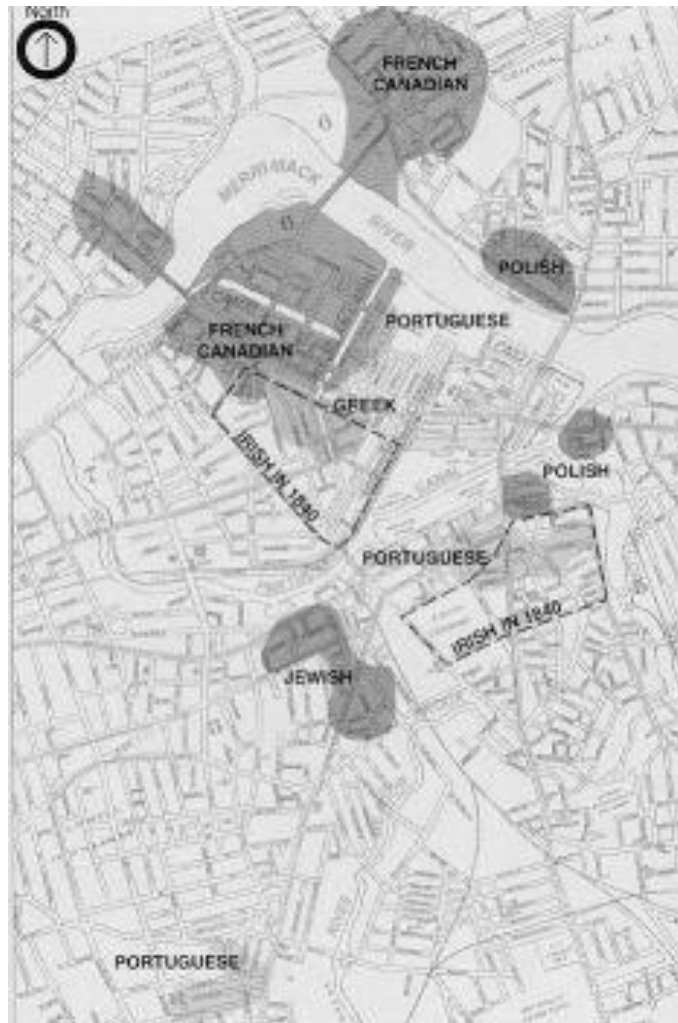
<sup>100</sup> Jack Kerouac to Stella Sampas, December 10, 1952, in *Selected Letters: 1940-1956*, 391.

## Appendix A: Illustrations



**IMAGE 1:** The Merrimack River

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Merrimackrivermap.png>)



**IMAGE 2:** Immigrant Map of Lowell, MA, highlighting dark grey areas based on population density and ethnicity.

(<http://www.nps.gov/lowe/photosmultimedia/images/immigrantmapbw.jpg>)

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